

PRESS RELEASE

September 18, 2002

RE: OPERATION WEBSLINGER

Earlier today, a press conference was held in Washington, D.C. by top United States law enforcement officials, including United States Attorney General John Ashcroft, DEA Director Asa Hutchinson, FBI Director Robert S. Mueller, III, Chief U.S Postal Inspector Lee Heath, and U.S. Customs Assistant Commissioner for Investigations John Varrone, to announce arrests across the United States and Canada as part of an international drug trafficking investigation entitled Operation Webslinger. That investigation targeted individuals and organizations involved in the illegal Internet sale of the "date rape" drug, gamma-hydroxybutyrate (GHB), and its derivative/analogue drugs, gamma-butyrolactone (GBL) and 1, 4 Butanediol (BD). According to those Officials in Washington, D.C., Operation Webslinger represents "the most significant enforcement effort" to date targeting drug traffickers using the Internet to buy and sell dangerous drugs and chemicals. Those officials also credited an investigation conducted here in Buffalo, as being one of four upon which the entire international investigation, involving over 104 arrests in 84 cities across the United States, was based.

Following the Washington, D.C. press conference, Michael A. Battle, United States Attorney for the Western District of New York, confirmed that his office and the local offices of the DEA, Customs, and Postal Service, together with the New York State Attorney General's Office and the Ontario Provincial Police and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, played a lead role in the Webslinger investigation.

According to U.S. Attorney Battle, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force

(OCDETF) investigation in the Western District of New York, focused on several Internet websites, operated by Canadian Nationals, which sold quantities of GBL and BD, together with "kits" for manufacturing GHB. The local investigation began early this year when agents in Buffalo seized approximately 850 packages of GBL and BD which had been shipped into the United States from Canada. As part of that investigation, federal agents in Buffalo, with the assistance of the New York State Attorney General's Office, the OPP and the RCMP were able to identify and gather evidence regarding numerous Internet websites and the principals operating them. U.S. Attorney Battle noted that the dramatic success of the Buffalo investigation was the result of a combined international law enforcement initiative which relied upon a mix of traditional investigative methods together with cutting edge law enforcement techniques. According to U.S. Attorney Battle, "as a result of the law enforcement efforts here in Buffalo, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York was able to secure indictments charging the three individuals who actually operated the largest websites selling these drugs and chemicals over the Internet. Moreover, as a result of the investigation here in Buffalo, leads were developed which were sent across the Country. Those Buffalo leads resulted in the seizure, both in the United States and Canada, of more than 700 additional shipments of the drugs and numerous arrests of scores of customers and distributors across the United States."

Among those indicted in Buffalo, were Daniel Pelchat, age 40, of St. Entienne, Quebec, Canada. The 24-count Indictment, charges Pelchat with numerous violations involving the importation and distribution of GBL and BD, conspiracy to manufacture GHB, and unlawfully using the Internet in furtherance of his drug crimes, in violation of Title 21, United States Code, Sections 841, 843(b), 846, 952(a), 959(a)(2), 960(d)(3), and 963. Most of those charges carry a maximum

penalty of 20 years imprisonment, a fine of \$1,000,000, or both. It should be noted that the fact that a defendant has been charged with a crime . . . is merely an accusation and the defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty. (Disciplinary Rule 7-107(B)(6)).

According to Assistant United States Attorney James P. Kennedy, Jr., who will handle the prosecution of the individuals charged, Pelchat is alleged to have operated at least 4 different Internet websites which sold GBL, BD, and GHB "kits." Pelchat, who is believed to have been perhaps the largest Internet supplier of these drugs in the world, even had a GHB manufacturing technique named after him. During the execution of 5 search warrants conducted by the RCMP in Quebec yesterday, agents seized from Pelchat's business and residence a total of approximately 1452 gallons of BD and GBL, together with other chemical used in the manufacture of GHB. The chemicals seized represent in excess of 20 million dosage units of the various drugs. On the street and in nightclubs, typical doses of these drugs cost between \$5 and \$10. Pelchat was arrested in Quebec pursuant to a provisional arrest warrant issued as a result of the Buffalo Indictment.

U.S. Attorney Battle also announced the 11 count Indictment, containing similar charges, of two other Canadians, Mark Frankland, age, 39, of Barrie, Ontario, and Cameron Marsh, age 41, of Midhurst, Ontario, who together operated another Internet website which is believed to have shipped approximately 5,000 orders for GBL, BD, and/or GHB "kits." Additionally, several Internet purchasers of these drugs, from both Buffalo and Rochester, were also charged as part of the Buffalo Investigation.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Kennedy, GHB, GBL, and BD are abused to produce

euphoria, intoxication and hallucinogenic states. They are also used as “date rape” drugs, acting as central nervous system depressants, which cause drowsiness, dizziness, nausea, loss of inhibition, memory loss and visual disturbances. Higher doses of these substances will cause unconsciousness, seizures, severe respiratory depression, coma and even death.

New York State Attorney General Eliot Spitzer said: “The investigation and prosecution of cases such as this require a team effort. I am proud that undercover investigators from my office were able to contribute their expertise to the Department of Justice to break-up a massive network that was distributing the controlled substance GBL. On far too many occasions, this dangerous drug has caused significant injury and death.”

As Customs Assistant Commissioner Varrone noted at the national press conference, “Operation Webslinger was unprecedented in that it combined the best investigative techniques of numerous federal agencies and Canadian authorities. I am especially proud of the U.S. Customs agents in Buffalo who played a major role in this investigation.”

DEA Director Hutchinson added, “Yesterday, law enforcement personnel from across the U.S. and Canada joined forces and reached deep into cyberspace to send a clear message – law enforcement will pierce the cloak of secrecy surrounding e-drug traffickers and bring them to justice. With literally thousands of people having quick and easy access to the internet, the buying and selling of deadly drugs and chemicals from the web should not, and will not, be as simple as ‘point and click’.”

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